

Matthew 9:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

Analysis

Jesus' response—"They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" (οὐ χρειαν εχουσιν οἱ ισχυοντες ιατρου αλλ οἱ κακως εχοντες)—uses medical metaphor to explain His mission. The 'whole' (healthy) versus 'sick' comparison exposes Pharisaic self-righteousness. Pharisees considered themselves spiritually healthy and sinners as diseased. Jesus doesn't dispute the metaphor but inverts its application: those who recognize their spiritual sickness seek the Physician; those who deny their illness remain fatally diseased. The Pharisees' problem isn't absence of sin but refusal to acknowledge it. Jesus comes not for the self-righteous but for those who recognize desperate need. This is gospel: diagnosis (you're sick unto death) and remedy (Jesus is the only cure).

Historical Context

Medical imagery was common in Jewish wisdom literature. Philo and other Jewish writers described Torah as medicine for the soul. Jesus appropriates this imagery but applies it personally—He is the Physician. In the ancient world, doctors made house calls to the sick; they didn't wait for patients to come to them. Similarly, Jesus seeks sinners rather than waiting for them to achieve righteousness first. Early church fathers elaborated this medical metaphor extensively, seeing sin as sickness and Christ as divine Physician.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing our spiritual sickness lead to seeking Jesus as Physician?
2. What is the relationship between self-righteousness and missing our need for Jesus?
3. In what ways are you currently 'sick' and needing Jesus' healing touch?

Interlinear Text

ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἀκούσας εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Οὐ χρειαν
G3588 **But** G1161 **when Jesus** G2424 **heard** G191 **that he said** G2036 **unto them** G846 **not** G3756 **need** G5532

ἔχοντες οἱ ἰσχύοντες ἰατροῦ ἀλλ' οἱ κακῶς
They that be G2192 **whole** G3588 G2480 **a physician** G2395 **but** G235 G3588 **sick** G2560

ἔχοντες
They that be G2192

Additional Cross-References

Luke 5:31 (References Jesus): And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.

Jeremiah 33:6 (Parallel theme): Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth.

Psalms 147:3 (Parallel theme): He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.

Mark 2:17 (References Jesus): When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Luke 9:11 (Parallel theme): And the people, when they knew it, followed him: and he received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing.

Jeremiah 17:14 (Parallel theme): Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise.

Hosea 14:4 (Parallel theme): I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.

Jeremiah 30:17 (Parallel theme): For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after.

Psalms 6:2 (Parallel theme): Have mercy upon me, O LORD; for I am weak: O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed.

Psalms 41:4 (Parallel theme): I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee.